

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PLAN

Message from Premier Stephen McNeil

I am pleased to share the 2014–2015 Nova Scotia Government Business Plan. This document provides highlights of the work that will be undertaken by many of our departments and agencies in the year ahead.

We are at a crossroads in Nova Scotia. We have tremendous opportunity in front of us but are stymied by an underperforming economy, a declining population, increasing costs, and decreasing revenues.

We cannot continue to do what we have always done.

The investments that will be made and the work that will be done in the year ahead are strategic, aimed specifically at beginning the hard work to tackle the challenges that face us. We will focus our limited dollars on our labour force; reinvesting in our classrooms; dealing with health-care wait times; supporting our primary industries; and diversifying our economy in partnership with the private sector. And we will keep the commitments we made to Nova Scotians in October 2013.

The work of government will be guided by the following principles:

- Fiscally, we will be vigilant with our spending of public dollars.
- Economically, we will work in partnership with Nova Scotians, entrepreneurs, and business to advance the interests of individuals, families, and communities.
- Socially, government will not waver from its commitment to support our most vulnerable citizens—and maintain a safety net that protects every one of us.

Working together we can capitalize on Nova Scotia's strengths. I look forward to the year ahead.

Sincerely,



Stephen McNeil
Premier of Nova Scotia

Fiscal sustainability

Nova Scotia's economic and fiscal challenges have been well documented. Demographics are our single biggest problem. Outmigration, low immigrant levels, an aging population, and low birth rate have placed a great deal of stress on Nova Scotia—economically and socially.

The fact that the economy cannot expand with a contracting workforce is borne out by our average economic growth, which remains behind all other provinces.

These realities have had a serious impact on the financial situation of the province.

Revenues from all major sources are coming in lower than expected and are not growing fast enough to keep pace with service demands. This is amplified by the costs associated with 300 bargaining units negotiating for 55 per cent of total department spending.

Government has worked over the last five-and-a-half months to exercise disciplined financial planning and to look for opportunities for savings and efficiencies where possible.

In the year ahead we will take a closer look at how and why we do things in government. We must determine if government should be delivering certain programs and services, and if the way we deliver them makes sense.

The Tax and Regulatory and Fee Review will also be completed in 2014–2015. Through this review we will chart a path that considers simplicity, fairness, competitiveness, and sustainability. Nova Scotia needs to be more competitive; we have to review taxes with the goal of supporting business growth and economic activity.

Competitive, diverse economy

A strong, vibrant economy is the key to addressing many of the challenges our province faces. In order to grow our economy, we need a diverse and competitive business environment.

We need more businesses that innovate and adapt to a rapidly changing global economy. Competition and innovation are the foundations of successful entrepreneurs, and these vital qualities cannot be engineered by even the most thoughtful and effective government programs.

The private sector must be the engine of Nova Scotia's economic growth.

Government is a partner and in the year ahead will help create conditions that attract companies and investment, and that allow businesses that are already here to grow and prosper.

Our economy is expected to expand by 1.4 per cent in 2014, and 2.1 per cent in 2015. This is better than we have been experiencing in Nova Scotia, but we cannot take accelerating growth for granted. Building the conditions for sustained, private sector expansion requires our government to take smart, prudent steps in areas where government can be most effective.

The work of government in the year ahead will focus on providing help to more of our graduates, tradespeople, and immigrants that will allow them to connect with opportunities to build their careers here and contribute to the economy. The potential of our primary industries and tourism sector will be leveraged to attract visitors and investments, and increase exports.

Highlights

Business Growth

- Enhance the Access to Business, or A2B, and Access for Citizens, A4C, web portals to reduce red tape and provide businesses and Nova Scotians with quicker, easier access to services and programs
- Extend the Credit Union Small Business Loan Guarantee Program by increasing term loan guarantees to 90 per cent from 75 per cent
- Create an environment that supports business and economic growth through the Tax and Regulatory and Fee Review

Workforce Development

- Modernize the Apprenticeship Program to give apprentices the experience they need to access good jobs
- Provide financial incentives through the START program to encourage Nova Scotia employers to hire apprentices who need work experience

- Develop a provincial population strategy to grow the workforce and increase the number of immigrants coming here and staying
- Align immigrants with our areas of greatest need and improve their ability to settle and join our workforce through the Regional Labour Market Demand Stream
- Help new graduates start their careers here by defraying the cost employers incur in the first year of hiring through the Graduate to Opportunities program
- Help high-value businesses recruit and provide meaningful work experiences to university and community college students by expanding the Strategic Cooperative Education Incentive program to a total of 425 funded private and non-profit positions each year
- Expand the Student Career Skills Development Program to support another 250 not-for-profit summer jobs in high unemployment areas for a total of 750 jobs for post-secondary students looking for career-specific experience

Primary Industries

- Attract investment in the offshore through the Offshore Growth Strategy, which will make geoscience information available to the industry and directly market our offshore to the world
- Promote Nova Scotia lobster nationally and internationally
- Invest in research and innovation in the mink industry—one of our fastest growing and globally competitive exports
- Help the apple industry grow more world-class products
- Prepare Western Crown Lands for harvesting
- Invest in a Harvest Tracking System to measure progress on the province's goal to reduce clear cutting by 50 per cent

Tourism

- Market Nova Scotia throughout the Northeastern United States to attract more visitors
- Upgrade and staff the Yarmouth Visitor Information Centre to provide the best possible visitor experience

Smart, strategic investments

Nova Scotia has some of the finest post-secondary institutions in the world, educating our best and brightest. Our universities help to drive the economy. In the coming year we will increase our support to universities and their students by offering incentives to live, work, and start a family in our province.

To stay, new graduates need job opportunities, and we know employers need support to reduce the costs associated with hiring a new grad in their first year on the job. New summer and co-op jobs will be created to help students and new grads build employable skills and access career opportunities. Financial barriers that prevent graduates from establishing roots here will be reduced.

New graduate scholarships will give students the funding they need to continue important work in research and development.

Highlights

- Eliminate the interest on the provincial portion of student loans for eligible students who have entered repayment on their provincial loans on or after November 1, 2007
- Provide tuition relief to encourage more medical graduates
- Provide financial incentives through the START program to encourage Nova Scotia employers to hire apprentices who need work experience
- Provide new graduate scholarships for innovation and research
- Increase university operating grants by 1 per cent

Investing in Nova Scotia's future

The year ahead will bring a new direction for our education system. The first full education review in 25 years will result in a plan to improve learning outcomes and better prepare the next generation for success in the workplace.

Limits on how many children can be in a single class will give teachers the time they need to help students individually and provide extra support to those with special needs. Wait times for early intervention programs will be reduced, reading recovery will be re-introduced, new approaches to math and literacy will be taken, and more support for students with special needs will be provided to ensure that children get the help they need when it makes the greatest difference.

Less fundraising pressure, Virtual Schools, and the expansion of SchoolsPlus will help communities better align local programs with local needs.

Highlights:

- Help students succeed in math by providing supports for teachers and a bridging program to ensure that students complete math in grade 10
- Help communities tailor school programming to local needs and enrich the educational experience, and reduce pressure to fundraise through increases to Student Support Grants
- Open the door to new opportunities for Nova Scotia students, especially those in small rural schools, by providing a wide variety of courses via Virtual Schools
- Reduce the student-to-counselor ratio and ensure equal access across the province by hiring 17 new guidance counsellors in the Halifax, Annapolis Valley, and Chignecto Central School Boards
- Remove the four-year limit on the tuition support program for students with special needs
- Ensure that high-needs students are supported by increasing funding for special education
- Expand SchoolsPlus into four schools (includes the two locations previously announced)—SchoolsPlus brings a range of mental health services and other health programs together with mentoring, homework support, social work, and justice services into schools where children, youth, and families can easily access them

Health and Wellness

The work of government in the year ahead will place our focus firmly on patients and families. Administrative costs will be reduced so that more of our health care dollars can be spent on better patient care, shorter wait times, and improved health outcomes for those with chronic disease.

Highlights:

- Move forward with a provincial approach to health-care delivery and reduce the number of district health authorities from 10 to 2 to put more focus on front-line care
- Hire more family doctors and specialists, attract more foreign doctors, and encourage more new doctors to stay by offering tuition relief
- Work to meet the national standard for hip and knee replacement wait times
- Improve access to cancer and other drugs including Lucentis and Avastin
- Expand home care and increase the number of care coordinators helping Nova Scotians access services
- Create a Chronic Disease Innovation Fund to encourage new, leading-edge ideas and approaches
- Increase the age of eligibility of the children's dental program to 14
- Expand the Boarding, Transportation and Ostomy program to help patients in need get to their medical appointments, purchase supplies, and stay near the hospital when traveling to receive care
- Develop a provincial Dementia Strategy

Statements of Mandate Departments and Agencies

All departments and agencies publish an annual business plan, or statement of mandate. These documents can be found at novascotia.ca.